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NSC FOR NEA STAFF

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HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Israel: Governance

[1](#)2. Syria

Key stories in the media:

Major electronic media cited the State of the Union Address that

President Bush delivered on Tuesday. The media reported that the President dedicated roughly half of his speech to domestic issues and that he asked Congress for support for his new Iraq strategy. The leading Internet news service Ynet said that the speech produced an oppressive silence instead of answers. Bush mentioned Israel once during his speech, when he reaffirmed America's commitment to the peace process. He was quoted as saying that the US was taking diplomatic steps to ensure peace in the Holy Land, with a Palestinian state existing in peace and security alongside Israel.

All media, except the ultra-Orthodox newspapers, led with an announcement by Attorney General Menachem Mazuz on Tuesday that Israel's President Moshe Katsav will be indicted for rape and a series of other sexual offenses against four different women. This morning Israel Radio cited Mazuz's belief that Katsav must suspend himself as he had pledged to the High Court of Justice. Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik will stand in for Katsav if he suspends himself.

Noting that 90 votes in the Knesset are needed to depose Katsav, the media reported that such a majority cannot be garnered. Israel Radio reported that 27 Knesset members will lodge a complaint to the Knesset's House Committee against the President to start an impeachment procedure. Leading media expect Katsav to announce such a decision today. Yediot bannered: "Resign!" The Jerusalem Post quoted sources close to Vice PM Shimon Peres as saying there is a majority in the Knesset to end secret ballot voting, ahead of the race to succeed Katsav, which they believe would allow Peres to win the Presidency.

This morning Israel Radio cited London's Daily Telegraph as saying that North Korea is helping Iran to prepare an underground nuclear test similar to the one Pyongyang carried out last year. Yediot reported that on Monday Likud Chairman MK Binyamin Netanyahu left for a trip to Boston and London in a campaign against Iran's nuclear policy. The newspaper quoted Netanyahu associates as saying that he is supposed to meet with State Treasurers in various US states, who hold a sway on large pension funds that invest in companies involved in huge projects in Iran. Yediot reported that Olmert is opposed to drives on the Iranian issue that are not officially under GOI policy. Leading media reported that Russia announced today that it has completed the sale of Tor-M1 anti-aircraft missiles to Iran.

Ha'aretz interviewed three American experts on Iran's nuclear weapons program, all former senior administration officials, who believe that the US must consider striking Iran in order to eliminate its nuclear threat. The experts -- Dr. Gary Samore, Vice President of the Council on Foreign Relations, Dr. Robert Einhorn, currently a senior adviser at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, and Richard Perle, a "neoconservative pillar" -- are participants in the Herzliya Conference. The Jerusalem Post reported that at the Herzliya Conference four US presidential aspirants -- Republicans (former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich) and Democratic Senators John Edwards (South Carolina) and John McCain (Arizona) called for stopping Iran's nuclear aspirations. Gingrich and McCain addressed the gathering via videoconference.

Ha'aretz quoted a senior officer in the IDF's General Staff as saying that during last summer's war in Lebanon, the option of a large-scale ground operation in southern Lebanon was not seriously discussed by the General Staff or by the political establishment until July 27, more than two weeks after the war broke out.

The Jerusalem Post and Israel Radio reported that on Tuesday the US presented a resolution condemning Holocaust denial to the UN General Assembly. The radio reported that at present 40 states support the proposed resolution, and that the US hopes that a total of 104 states will endorse him -- the number of states that supported the designation of an International Day of Commemoration for Victims of the Holocaust every January 27.

The media continued to report on opposition protests in Lebanon, in which three people were killed and over 100 wounded.

Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday Palestinian gunmen from Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades abducted a French diplomat and two of his bodyguards. The three were released a few hours later, after it

became clear that they were not undercover IDF troops. Leading media reported that on Tuesday gunmen who identified themselves as Al-Qaida militants blew up several buildings in vacant Al-Waha resort on a northern Gaza Strip beach. Media said that the militants are believed, however, to actually be Hamas members.

Leading media reported that on Tuesday PM Ehud Olmert promoted the Lachish region between Jerusalem and Beersheva as a new home for the evacuees from the Gaza Strip.

The Jerusalem Post reported that 12 of Kadima's 29 Knesset members signed a petition of 61 MKs that Likud MK Yisrael Katz drafted, opposing any future withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The newspaper quoted Katz as saying that the breakup of Kadima would "come soon."

The Jerusalem Post reported that Hebrew Union College President Rabbi David Ellenson told the Herzliya Conference on Tuesday that he is concerned about a situation in which the grandchildren of American and Israeli Jews will not have a "common language."

Maariv reported that the US Congress is working on a bill that would limit to US soil the handling the granting of US citizenship to relatives of US citizens. The newspaper wrote that the applicants might consequently have to wait for two years until they get green cards. Maariv cited the US Embassy in Tel Aviv as saying that the change is a worldwide one and based on a change of legislation.

Yediot and Maariv quoted National Infrastructure Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer as saying at the Herzliya Conference on Tuesday that Israel should explore the possibility of building a nuclear reactor to produce energy. Ben-Eliezer was quoted as saying that, due to the regional situation, Israel is unable to rely on regular energy alone.

Yediot reported that the Kuwaiti newspaper Al-Watan has suggested that Environment Minister Gideon Ezra take up the parallel post in Kuwait.

Yediot quoted a former Science Ministry official as saying on Tuesday that "someone in the Science Ministry forgot that the Science Minister is privy to state secrets." The official was referring to the expected appointment of Israeli Arab MK Raleb Majadele to the post of minister of science, technology, culture, and sports.

Ha'aretz cited an AP story that last night, at heavily Jewish Brandeis University in Massachusetts, former US President Jimmy Carter was about to respond to the critics of his controversial book, "Palestine: Peace not Apartheid" AP wrote that Carter declined to debate Harvard Law Prof. Alan Dershowitz at the University.

Ha'aretz reported that Jewish American billionaire Ronald Lauder told the newspaper on Tuesday that he is "very interested" in running for president of the World Jewish Congress, but that he will not consider himself a candidate until elections are announced. The newspaper noted that the sitting President, Canadian billionaire Edgar Bronfman, has reportedly been planning to hand the reins to his son Matthew in the summer.

Maariv reported that FM Tzipi Livni has entered an agreement with Akira Amari, Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry, to open a direct El Al route between Tel Aviv and Tokyo.

1. Israel: Governance:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "The hope is, and this has a good chance of happening, that the IDF will regain its composure and will renew the public's faith in it."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Justice, in Moshe Katsav's case, should

be done and seen immediately. Here and now."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "[Israel's] President will resign. If not today -- tomorrow. If not tomorrow -- the day after."

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote from the World Economic Forum in Davos in Yediot Aharonot: "A heavy shadow has fallen over Israel's image around the world.... It is unpleasant, but we deserve it."

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in Ha'aretz: "The issue at hand is no longer the dignity of the President, but the dignity due to an entire nation."

Block Quotes:

I. "Restoring the IDF to Itself"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (1/24): "The quick decision by Amir Peretz to appoint Major General (res.) Gabi Ashkenazi as the next Israel Defense Forces chief of staff is his most important decision as Defense Minister. Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's consent to the recommendation allows the IDF to turn over a new leaf.... Time is of the essence because the threats facing Israel did not disappear with the cease-fire ending the second Lebanon war.... Ashkenazi knows the North very well, including the other side of the border with Lebanon and Syria. Among his first tasks will be to scrutinize the IDF's new plan of operation and the reorganization that was implemented before the war. He will have to recommend a prioritized plan to protect the area around the Gaza Strip against rockets, as well as the means to intercept Katyusha rockets. The hope is, and this has a good chance of happening, that the IDF will regain its composure and will renew the public's faith in it."

II. "Go Home!"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (1/24): "The State of Israel vs. the President of the State of Israel. The number one citizen turns into the number one defendant. If the suspicions against him are proven, it will be necessary to send Moshe Katsav to prison, and for a long time.... If what is attributed to him is true, if indeed Moshe Katsav was a predatory and trampling sex machine that exploited, humiliated and wounded women throughout his political career, if all these things are proven in court, it will be necessary to remove the man from human society and to prosecute him to the full extent of the law, and perhaps even more. He should resign, the attorney general should conduct a quick hearing for him, the indictment should be filed quickly and the trial should be held efficiently, without undue red tape or time wasting. Justice, in Moshe Katsav's case, should be done and seen immediately. Here and now."

III. "He Will Go"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote on page one of the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/24): "[Israel's] President will resign. If not today -- tomorrow. If not tomorrow -- the day after. Resignation, not temporary incapacitation or any other trick, is what is needed now in order to save what is left of the institution of the presidency, and in order to return the affair to its proper proportions. In doing so, Moshe Katsav the man will do a great service, perhaps a final service, to Israeli society and its sanity. The country will thank him.... I am Dreyfus, Katsav says, and hopes for someone like Emile Zola, to stand up and cry: 'J'accuse.' Luckily for us, Israel of the 21st century is not France of the 19th century. The prosecution in Israel sometimes commits the sin of over-zealousness and sometimes the sin of carelessness, but no serious person believes that it is conspiring against the President."

IV. "Shame to be an Israeli"

Chief Economic Editor Sever Plotker wrote from the World Economic Forum in Davos in Yediot Aharonot (1/24): "Israel's image is worse

than it has ever been.... What kind of Israel is depicted in the pages [of the European newspapers]? A country of rapists and corrupt figures in the leadership, which is sinking to a moral low. The report of the indictment against Israel's president opens all the news bulletins in Europe, and the anchors sound as if they cannot believe the text they have read out: The State of Israel and sex scandals in the leadership? Jews and rape? Jews and corruption? A heavy shadow has fallen over Israel's image around the world. Until we remove it, decent people will hesitate to shake our hands, to identify with us and to invest here. They are already hesitating.... It is very unpleasant to be an Israeli in Davos of 2007. It is unpleasant, but we deserve it."

IV. "The Saddest Day"

Columnist and former Meretz Party Chairman Yossi Sarid wrote in Ha'aretz (1/24): "It is a sad day, possibly the saddest day for statesmanship in Israel.... Now the cloud is descending not just over the President, but over the entire government..... Since the accusations came to light some six months ago, I have refrained from writing about the subject or expressing my opinion on it. I gave Katsav the benefit of the doubt. But in the current situation, even if there is a doubt, there is no more doubt. The issue at hand is no longer the dignity of the President, but the dignity due to an entire nation."

12. Syria:

Summary:

Shlomo Avineri, Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "In the private negotiations conducted by Dr. Liel and his supporters, the Syrian territorial approach was accepted completely and without question. This should have been told to the Israeli public."

Block Quotes:

"Where Will the Border Pass?"

Shlomo Avineri, Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (1/24): "The public debate currently being conducted with regard to the issue of negotiations with Syria is accompanied by a great deal of passion and ideology, but it sometimes ignores the simple facts of the history of the talks with Syria so far. This also applies to the manner in which the details of the private talks recently held between [former Foreign Ministry director general] Dr. Alon Liel with an American-Syrian figure were presented to the public. The main disputed issue in the past talks with Syria was the problem of the future border.... In a report on what was supposed to be agreed upon in the private talks conducted by Dr. Liel, it was stated laconically that there would be a withdrawal from the Golan Heights and a return to the June 4 borders.... Perhaps some would agree that this is a proper price for peace with Syria; this is a matter that is open to debate. What is not open to debate is that in the private negotiations conducted by Dr. Liel and his supporters, the Syrian territorial approach was accepted completely and without question. This should have been told to the Israeli public."

JONES